

CHANGE YOUR LIFE. CHANGE YOUR WORLD.

# activated

Vol 19 • Issue 12

## SIMPLE JOYS

Love and faith

## Where Jesus Lives

The stable—or your heart?

## Alone at Christmas?

Try reaching out





## EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION KEEPING CHRISTMAS

Another Christmas is almost here, and if you're like most people, you're probably so busy with all that goes into Christmas that you haven't yet found much time to stop and think about "the reason for the season." Well, here's your chance! This issue of *Activated* is all about putting the meaning and joy

back into Christmas.

To get us started, I'm including here excerpts of a piece written nearly 100 years ago by American poet and theologian Henry van Dyke (1852–1933), called "Keeping Christmas." In it, he asks some provocative questions that are just as relevant today as they were then:

There is a better thing than the *observance* of Christmas Day, and that is *keeping* Christmas.

Are you willing to forget what you have done for other people and to remember what other people have done for you?

To ignore what the world owes you, and to think what you owe the world?

To stoop down and consider the needs and desires of little children?

To remember the weakness and loneliness of people who are growing old?

To stop asking how much your friends like you, and ask yourself whether you love them enough?

To make a grave for your ugly thoughts and a garden for your kindly feelings? ...

Are you willing to believe that love is the strongest thing in the world—stronger than hate, stronger than death—and that the blessed Life which began in Bethlehem many years ago is the image and brightness of eternal love?

Then you can keep Christmas.

On behalf of all of us at *Activated*, I'd like to wish you a very happy, faith-filled Christmas.

Samuel Keating  
Executive Editor

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# THE WAY HOME

BY ROSANE PEREIRA

**IT WAS WINTERTIME** and I had just arrived in the state of Goa, the former Portuguese colony on the southwest coast of India. I was a long way from my home country of Brazil, but right away I made friends with a young mixed-faith couple—he was Catholic and she was Hindu—whose marriage had been rejected by both their families. They had opened a small restaurant right on one of the beaches popular with backpack tourists, where they let us sleep at night.

The beach was right at my doorstep, and it was paradise. At night, the wet sand reflected the star-filled sky like a mirror, as if it was somehow both above and below. In Goa, I could see part of the same southern sky as in Brazil, and the same Orion constellation that is

known as “The Three Marys.” When I felt lonely, the southern stars made me feel comforted and closer to home.

In the last week before the holidays, I went to the local post office, and when the clerk saw I had received a letter from Brazil, he switched from English to Portuguese and called everyone. “There is a girl from Brazil here, a *brasileira*.” Then they took me inside through the staff door to show me around and wish me a Merry Christmas.

I listened to the older employees reminisce about learning Portuguese. A couple of them had even visited Portugal back in the day. My letter seemed to be quite an exciting event, and some of the other customers in the queue joined in the conversation as well.

These perfect strangers stopped everything just to enjoy the wonder of meeting someone from a faraway land, who spoke the same language and had a shared culture! At the time, I was too bewildered to thank them, but I could never forget how they filled that Christmas with human warmth and the sensation of being home again!

This brought to mind how Jesus came from a faraway land, and speaking in our own language, told us of the wonders of His love and the promise of a place by His side forever.

And He certainly showed us the way home!

ROSANE PEREIRA IS AN ENGLISH TEACHER AND WRITER IN RIO DE JANEIRO, BRAZIL, AND A MEMBER OF THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL. ■

# Christmas Shalom

BY PETER AMSTERDAM

ONE OF THE PORTIONS OF THE NATIVITY STORY that I find most beautiful and meaningful is when the angel appeared to the shepherds and announced Jesus' birth, followed by a multitude of heavenly hosts praising God. It's such a fitting entrance for the birth of the Son of God:

"That night there were shepherds staying in the fields nearby, guarding their flocks of sheep. Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord's glory surrounded them. They were terrified, but the angel reassured them. 'Don't be afraid!' he said. 'I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David!'"<sup>1</sup>

The angel announced the birth of the Savior, but that wasn't the end: "Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others—the armies of heaven—praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased.'"<sup>2</sup>

This connection between the Savior and peace is seen in the Old Testament prophecies as well; for example, in the book of Isaiah, where we are told: "A child has been born for us. We have been given a son who will be our ruler. His names will be Wonderful Advisor and Mighty God, Eternal Father and Prince of Peace."<sup>3</sup>

In both the Old and New Testaments, the Messiah—the Savior—has a connection to peace. Yet as we look at the world today, or at almost any time

1. Luke 2:8–11 NLT

2. Luke 2:13–14 NLT

3. Isaiah 9:6 CEV

4. Romans 5:8,10 CEV



in history, peace is often the last thing we see. Wars and civil strife are endemic to humanity. Sadly, lasting peace throughout the earth hasn't happened, and it certainly doesn't exist today. So why is Jesus called the Prince of Peace? Why did the angels, when praising God at Jesus' birth, speak of peace?

The word used most often for peace in the Old Testament is *shalom*. While this word is sometimes used in Scripture to define peace as the absence of war, it has other meanings as well. The root meaning refers to being whole or sound. It speaks of completeness, soundness, safety, health and prosperity, contentment, tranquility, harmony, peace of mind, the absence of anxiety and stress. It also refers to friendship between individuals, as well as peace and friendship between individuals and God.

The Greek word most often used in the New Testament for peace, *eirēnē*, is sometimes used to mean a state of national tranquility and the exemption from the havoc of war. However, it is used more often to express security, safety, prosperity, harmony, and good will between individuals. It also refers to the tranquil state of a soul assured of its salvation.

While the world will one day know peace in the sense of an absence of war after Jesus' second coming, the peace so often spoken of in God's Word refers to the overall wholeness of individuals, both physically and spiritually. Scripture repeatedly states that such wholeness, tranquility, and *shalom* comes through having a right relationship with God, a relationship made possible through the Savior, whom the angels announced to the shepherds that night over two millennia ago.

Jesus' life, death, and resurrection brought reconciliation between God and man. Through faith in Jesus, the Prince of Peace, we're able to be at peace with God. "God showed how much he loved us by having Christ die for us, even though we were sinful. Even when we were God's enemies, he made peace with us, because his Son died for us. Yet something even greater than friendship is ours. Now that we are at peace with God, we will be saved by his Son's life."<sup>4</sup>

Through the Prince of Peace, harmony and relationship can be restored between God and all those who embrace Jesus as their Savior. We can then possess the fullness of *shalom*: completeness, soundness, safety, contentment, tranquility, harmony, and peace of mind, which is the source of inner peace in the midst of the storms and challenges that we all face throughout our lives.

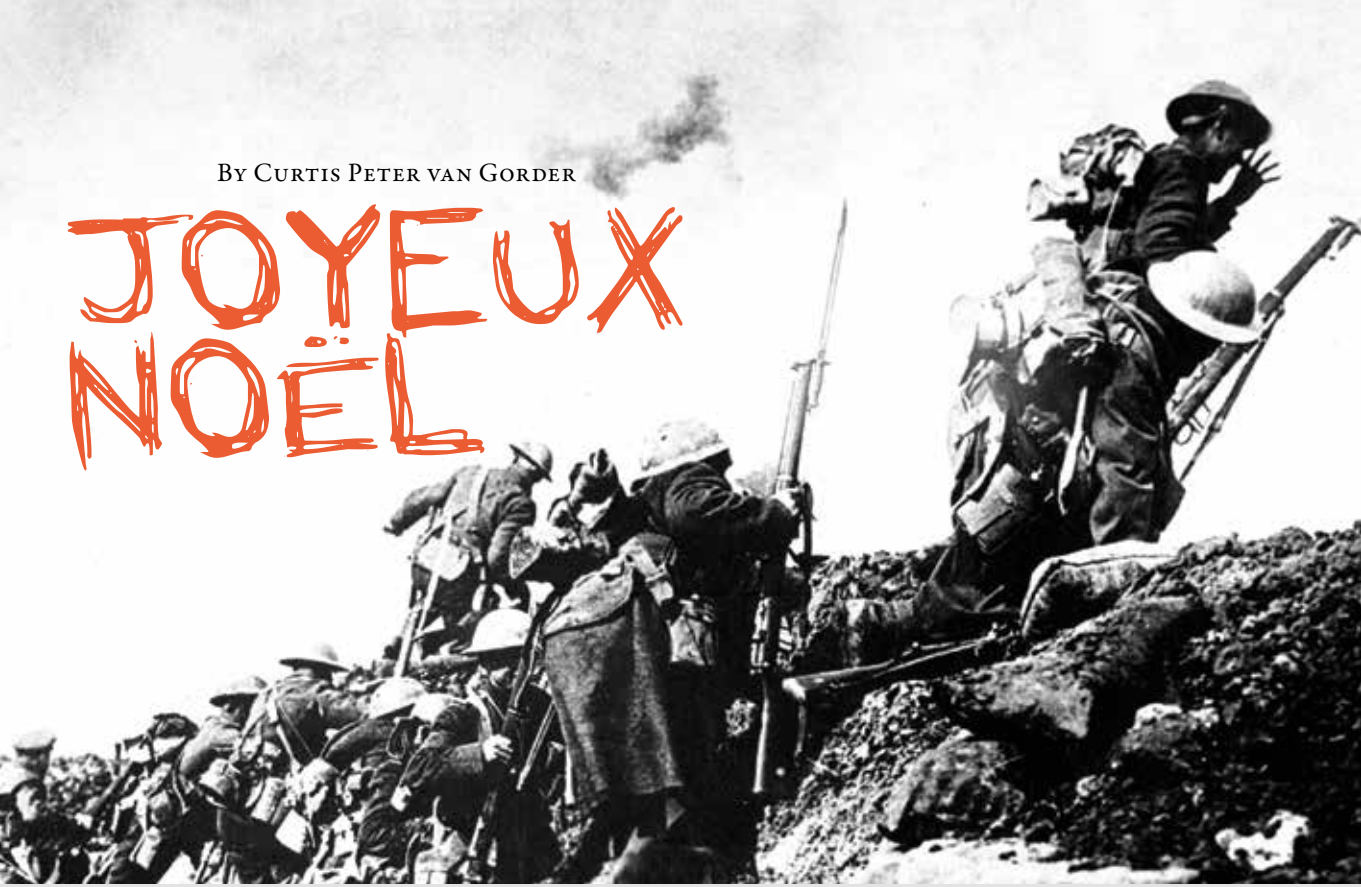
Jesus, the Lord of peace, brings us peace that exceeds anything we can understand—as it says in the original Hebrew, *shalom shalom*. Repeating a word was the Hebrew way of expressing a higher degree; in this case, not just peace but *perfect* peace. We find peace in the Savior, peace when we love God's Word, peace when our ways please Him, peace through the presence of the Holy Spirit, peace in faith, and peace when Christ rules in our hearts.

The angels praising God on the night of Jesus' birth were heralding the peace that God was making available through the birth of the Savior—the peace with God that comes through salvation, the inner peace that comes from our connection with God, the peace we have from knowing that God loves us and has made a way for us to be with Him forever.

PETER AMSTERDAM AND HIS WIFE, MARIA FONTAINE, ARE DIRECTORS OF THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL, A CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY OF FAITH. ADAPTED FROM ORIGINAL ARTICLE. ■

BY CURTIS PETER VAN GORDER

# JOYEUX NOËL



## WITHOUT AN ENEMY THERE CAN BE NO WAR.

I recently rewatched the movie *Joyeux Noël* (Christian Carion, 2005), which tells the story of a well-documented event that occurred on a battlefield in France on Christmas Eve, 1914.

One engagement of the Great War (WWI) involved some 3,000 soldiers from the Scottish, French, and German armies. On Christmas Eve, someone on the German side began to sing “Silent Night.” Soon a Scot’s bagpipe responded, and before long all three belligerents were singing the song in unison from the same trenches 100 meters apart where a few hours earlier they

had been killing one another. What a contrast!

Coaxed into peace by the warmth of this universally loved song, the warring sides ventured out of their trenches and agreed on an unofficial truce. In some places along the line, the Christmas truce lasted for ten days. Enemies exchanged photos, addresses, chocolate, champagne, and other small gifts. They discovered that they had more in common than they realized, including a cat that wandered from side to side and made friends with everyone, which both sides claimed as their mascot.

The erstwhile enemies communicated as best they could in each other’s language. The German commander, Horstmayer, said to French Lieutenant Audebert, “When we take Paris, it will all be over. Then

you can invite me up for a drink at your house in Rue Vavin!” “Don’t feel that you have to invade Paris to get a drink at my house!” Audebert replied.

The friendship that was forged between the warring sides went beyond mere pleasantries. The morning after the Christmas truce ended, each side warned the other of artillery shelling that they knew was coming from their artillery units. Their newfound sense of camaraderie was so strong that some of the soldiers were even sheltered in the opposing side’s trenches to keep them from harm.

What brought about this incredible transformation? It all started with a shared love of that beloved Christmas carol.

This incident reminds us that there is a cure to war, and that is to stop

1. See Matthew 5:44.
2. <http://elixirmime.com>



## A CHRISTMAS PRAYER

*Attributed to Robert Louis Stevenson (1850–1894)*

Loving God, help us to remember the birth of Jesus that we may share in the songs of the angels, the gladness of the shepherds, and the worship of the wise men. Close the door of hate and open the door of love all over the world. Let kindness come with every gift and good desires with every greeting. Deliver us from evil by the blessing which Christ brings. May our minds be filled with grateful thoughts and our hearts with forgiveness, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

demonizing our enemies and learn to love them, as Jesus taught us to do.<sup>1</sup> To be sure, that's far easier said than done. But it's not impossible. We need to learn to look beyond the external differences of race, color, creed, and ideologies and realize that everyone shares a common need—love. Everyone needs to love and be loved. If we would each make an effort to get to know others with whom we seem to have little in common, we just might find, as the soldiers on that battlefield did, that we have quite a bit more in common than we realized.

Considering that WWI lasted over three years after this incident and claimed nearly 20 million lives, and considering that many dozens of wars have been fought since then, claiming untold millions more, one might conclude that the

gesture of friendship and goodwill of that Christmas Eve was in vain. The soldiers that participated were severely reprimanded. Their superiors, in an attempt to make sure that this incident would not be repeated, ordered increased shelling the next Christmas. Nevertheless, this story of peace in the midst of war lives on and continues to break down the barriers that make enemies of potential friends. Ultimately it's a testimony to the power of God's love, which is the essence of Christmas.

CURTIS PETER VAN GORDER IS A SCRIPTWRITER AND MIME ARTIST<sup>2</sup> IN GERMANY. HIS GRANDFATHER TOOK PART IN THE EVENTS DESCRIBED IN THIS ARTICLE. AFTER THE WAR, HE EMIGRATED TO THE USA AND BECAME A PACIFIST. ■

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

—*Matthew 5:9 NIV*



Some of us ... think [to] ourselves, *If I had only been there! How quick I would have been to help the Baby. I would have washed His linens. How happy I would have been to go with the shepherds to see the Lord lying in the manger!* Yes, we would. We say that because we know how great Christ is, but if we had been there *at that time*, we would have done no better than the people of Bethlehem. ... Why don't we do it *now*? We have Christ in our neighbor.

—*Martin Luther (1483–1546)*



# THE REQUEST

BY SAMANTHA JONES

**IT WAS MY FIRST CHRISTMAS IN TAIPEI, TAIWAN**, when I heard the Christmas classic “Silent Night” sung in Chinese for the first time. It made a special impression, and I remember thinking that I had to learn the words. The first line was fairly easy—after all, half of it is the song title—but beyond that it got harder.

Even though I could only understand the most basic words in Mandarin Chinese, two friends and I felt we couldn’t let our lack of vocabulary deter us from sharing the Christmas spirit. Before I knew it, we were propelled into a busy schedule of Christmas benefit performances.

The ten days leading up to Christmas were packed with carol singing and song and dance performances.

My second Christmas in Taipei, our voices bounced off the slick walls of some of the city’s trendiest malls and rang down the stark corridors of a detention center for delinquent boys. The appreciation we received from the boys was touching—thanks etched on each face for sharing with them the true meaning of Christmas. Patients at the hospitals we performed at that year also thanked us for remembering them. We dressed as clowns and brought smiles to the faces of the orphans we visited.

As I helped pass out donated toys to needy children, it occurred to me that God always has the perfect Christmas gift for everyone—exactly what He knows each one needs most at the time. I recalled homes for the elderly, where the hugs from children soothed hearts that ached for their own absent families. At a shelter for the poor, a load of assorted gifts included baby items that came as an answer to a young mother’s earnest prayers.

Then came my third Christmas in Taipei. By this time I had finally learned “Silent Night” in Chinese, but since I was accompanying our little singing group on the guitar, I





Then I saw him—an elderly gentleman, probably in his late 70s. He smiled, and I smiled

back. He motioned for me to sit beside him, and I eased myself onto the bench, letting my guitar slide down to the ground behind me.

“Thank you ... for coming here,” he said slowly. It took a moment for me to realize he was speaking in English. I asked him if he had enjoyed the show, and we quickly switched to Mandarin when I realized he had exhausted his English vocabulary.

He was sorry he hadn't seen our show, he said, but had heard about our ongoing work at the hospital and thought it was wonderful that we would come to his country to do all this. He made a wide, sweeping gesture with his hands to accentuate “all.”

Trying to keep the conversation alive, I told him that I had come to the hospital the year before too.

“And you may come the next,” the old man replied in Mandarin, with a twinkle in his eye, “but I won't be here.”

I felt foolish when I realized that he wasn't talking about not being at

the hospital. He didn't expect to live to see the next Christmas.

“If you like,” I stammered awkwardly, “I can sing you a song *now*. I'm only one person and I don't know many songs, but...”

A look of satisfaction came across his wrinkled face, and he gave a sigh. “There *is* one song I would like to hear,” he said.

I cringed at the thought of having to meet a specific request. I would hate to disappoint him. And then my eyes fell on the piece of paper he was holding in his hands. It was the gospel tract I had given him when I first sat down. On the front was an illustration of a present wrapped with ribbons and the words “Christmas Gifts for You.”

And then I understood. Through all those toys and other presents, the laughs, the tears, and the encouragement we shared with others along the way, God was bringing to each heart the gift they most needed. I just had to be willing to be His hands and feet, His eyes, His ears, His mouth. Suddenly I knew it was going to be okay. I smiled bravely, even before he finished his request.

“Please,” he said, “sing ‘Silent Night.’” ■

was out of the spotlight during our shows. We went from centers for the disabled to hospitals and back again. Each time I played “Silent Night,” I remembered that little voice telling me to learn the words in Chinese. I wondered why I had gone to all the trouble.

A few days before Christmas, I was standing in the lobby of the Yang Ming Hospital, plucking absent-mindedly at my guitar. Our show was over, and some of the others had gone into the wards to cheer up patients who hadn't been able to come to our performance. Someone had to stay with our equipment, and that happened to be me this time.



BY LILIA POTTERS

# ALONE AT CHRISTMAS?

OVER THE YEARS, Christmas has taken on different meanings for me. When I was a young child, it meant a special family holiday, the Christmas story at Sunday school, walking home in the snow, a brown paper bag with a big Jaffa orange, whole walnuts to crack, and a new book to read.

After receiving Jesus as my Savior, Christmas took on the meaning of sharing the message of His birth and “good will to men” with others.

Still later, after I got married and had children, it meant making new family traditions, which included decorating, gift buying and giving, and preparing and consuming elaborate Christmas dinners together in a bustling and cozy home atmosphere.


All of these past Christmases evoke warm memories, and as Norman Vincent Peale so aptly said, thinking about them waves a magic wand over my world and makes everything seem softer and more beautiful.

However, when my family dynamic changed with divorce and children leaving home, I came to experience what it means to be an empty nester—and alone at Christmas. It wasn't an easy adjustment.

That first Christmas morning alone in a small apartment, I woke to a decorated but silent home. I was heading to my son's in-laws later that day, and got up to prepare a side dish for the dinner they were hosting. The presents under my tree would also be taken to their home for distribution. It was the first time for me to not host an event at Christmas and to not be surrounded by kids and grandkids, and I had to fight against the forlorn and lonely feelings that started to overwhelm me.

The time spent together later that day was lovely, and I enjoyed the time I had with my son, grandson, and his wife's family very much—until it was time to go back to my empty flat. Driving home alone was miserable, and once back home, I shed some lonely tears.

Sitting in my silent living room, I picked up a Christmas-themed gift book on my coffee table, and leafing through the pages, I reflected on how Jesus left His home in heaven to bring love and hope to the world. I realized that I undoubtedly wasn't the only lonely person that Christmas, and after drying my tears, I picked up the phone and dialed the number of an elderly woman



I had befriended some time ago. Talking with her, I learned that she also had been home alone, and she was so grateful for our chat. I also called my children whom I hadn't spoken with yet that day, and some relatives abroad, and found that some of them hadn't had the “perfect” Christmas either. I felt better after reaching out to others, and I determined there and then to remember this for next Christmas, and all the ones after that.

Each of my Christmases since has been different. One Christmas I volunteered and spent time helping a few elderly people decorate their trees or homes, as it can be hard for them to get it done on their own. I've also baked cookies with my grandchildren and taken them around to neighbors who don't get many visitors. And a phone or FaceTime call never failed



to make a difference and bring smiles to my face and the faces of those who lived too far away to go see.

Life happens, and you, too, may find yourself alone at Christmas because of children moving out, divorce, or bereavement. It's not an easy adjustment to make, and lonely tears may flow at times. Still, although circumstances may be different, being alone at Christmas doesn't have to be a negative experience. Even when we're alone, we're never *completely* alone, because Jesus is always with us, and when we reach out and give of ourselves to others, fulfillment and joy come back to us.

LILIA POTTERS IS A WRITER AND EDITOR IN THE USA. ■

A mother's love for her baby boy  
A sacrifice to bring others joy  
A father's care for one not his own  
A message sent from a royal throne  
A seeming wrong that was turned to right  
An angel's song in the dark of night  
A prophet's vision at last fulfilled  
A miracle because God had willed  
A gift of love from a caring heart  
A bringing together what was apart  
A reaching out to comprehend  
How another felt by a sincere friend  
A seeking soul that journeyed far  
To find a dream, to follow a star  
A bridegroom claiming a bride as his  
All these things are what Christmas is.  
—*Ian Bach*

Christmas is not made special by presents, decorations, and parties, but by what we give to Jesus and to others from our hearts. Giving from our hearts demonstrates true gratitude and appreciation for all God has given us.  
—*Alex Peterson*

My idea of Christmas, whether old-fashioned or modern, is very simple: loving others. Come to think of it, why do we have to wait for Christmas to do that?  
—*Bob Hope (1903–2003)*



# THE RIGHT PRICE

BY PRISCILA LIPCIUC

I GREW UP IN COMMUNIST ROMANIA, where there was a state ban on religion, so “finding Christmas” wasn’t easy.

“Don’t use the word ‘Christmas’ at school or with people you don’t know,” I remember being told when I turned school age. We used the word at home because some members of my extended family were old enough to have grown up before the ban and still secretly kept the holiday. With everyone else, the tree was to be called “the New Year tree.” Christmas was “the winter holiday.” If we children received gifts, there was no mention of Christmas attached.

I was only a few years old when we got our first tree. It had real candles on the branches, and each day, my reward for being good was having the candles lit for a few minutes.

A few years later, I remember looking at the only Orthodox icon

in our house through the branches of the Christmas tree and wondering if there was any connection between the two. Who is that pictured there? Why do we keep a picture of someone we don’t know?

I also remember the first Christmas I celebrated in the countryside with other members of my family. The people there had a bit more freedom, and we listened to Christmas carolers sing about the first Christmas. It was beautiful, but it didn’t make much sense to me. It wasn’t until the Communist regime collapsed that I got a chance to learn about Christmas and other truths from the Bible.

When I became a mother, our apartment was filled with Christmas music, and every corner was decorated, but my face was often tearstained. I was happy, yes, but my heart also broke at the thought of God giving up His only Son to save

us. The thought of giving my own dear Emanuel for someone else was more than I could bear. I might be able to give my own life for another, but never my *sons*!

The thought of God letting go of His only Son, knowing what was to befall Him, was overwhelming. I was happy and thankful that God chose to do what He did, but it also broke my heart. The joy was there—the ever-present joy of Christmas—but so was the realization of the magnitude of the sacrifice that God made for us.

I still shed a few tears at Christmas when I remember the pain behind our joy, but the joy far outweighs the sadness. And that’s as it should be. It was a price God was willing to pay because of His love for us!

PRISCILA LIPCIUC HAS BEEN A MISSIONARY IN EASTERN EUROPE FOR MORE THAN 20 YEARS. ■



# Simple Joys

BY CARI HARROP

I WAS THINKING ABOUT MY MOM on her birthday, and realized that there was something very special about my childhood—the times we spent together. More specifically, I was thinking about the Christmases when I was small. The thing that made each memory special wasn't the number or value of the gifts we received or the Christmas parties we attended. Rather, it was the simple things.

First there was the Christmas when we made an extra effort to do things together as a family, when we made a nativity scene in our living room out of an old board topped with miniature pine trees and figurines that we'd made and dressed ourselves.

The cold little house we lived in another year was warmed by a cassette tape of Christmas carols—a first for us children—and the joy of finding oranges in the stockings we

had hung out, along with nuts and raisins wrapped in foil. That year we also had a Christmas tree with homemade ornaments depicting the fruits of the Holy Spirit—love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.<sup>1</sup>

Then there was the Christmas when I was smaller still. We strung popcorn and hung it on the tree. There was hardly any left by the end of December, for a little mouse, cleverly disguised as a three-year-old in pigtails, nibbled away whenever she thought no one was looking.

There was also the Christmas when I was nine, when we six girls awoke to a surprise—a line of white shoe boxes, each clearly marked with one of our names and each containing something special that we needed or could play with—skipping ropes, jacks, a hairbrush or hairclips, small clothing items, etc. What treats those

were for us children whose parents were full-time volunteers!

Thinking about those special occasions caused me to want to give my own children that same love, excitement, and warmth this Christmas. I want them to have happy memories to look back on. That's when I realized what it was that had made those moments so special: it was my parents' love and the time they had given us, which demonstrated that love. It was also our parents' faith in Jesus and God's Word that gave us what we needed—His love and salvation and a purpose in life—reaching and winning others with God's truth.

No, we didn't have a lot, but we had the Lord and one another—and that's what made those such happy and special Christmases.

CARI HARROP IS A MOTHER OF FOUR LIVING IN TEXAS, USA. ■

1. See Galatians 5:22–23.

BY MARIE ALVERO

# DO FOR ONE

**SOMETIMES I FEEL PARALYZED** by all the suffering in the world. There's simply no way I could make a dent in all the hunger, sickness, poverty, depression, oppression, loneliness, and death. When you look at the brokenness in its entirety, all you see is desolation.

But I have come to understand how that point of view is actually a tricky way to get myself off the hook, and a very selfish mindset. Someone challenged me to "do for one" what I could not do for many. With that mindset, there's always something I can do.

In the office where I work, I couldn't help but overhear the struggles of a single mom coworker. Christmas was approaching. She had some funds for gifts coming from grandparents and other sources, but was finding paycheck-to-paycheck living hard with all the extra expenses of the season. My heart broke for her.

That day, I had \$40 in my wallet. I penned a quick note, stuffed it all in an envelope, and gave it to her with a "Merry Christmas." I did it all very quickly, before I could talk myself out of it. I didn't want

In every day, there are 1,440 minutes. That means we have 1,440 daily opportunities to make a positive impact.—*Les Brown (b. 1945)*

to embarrass her, it seemed a small amount, maybe someone else needed it more ... Excuses, excuses.

When she opened the envelope she teared up. Someone had met her in her struggle, even if just for a moment. I was happy I had stretched myself a little, but mostly, I was impressed at the impact any of us can have on just one person.

- One person you invite for coffee
- One child you commit to sponsor
- One lonely acquaintance you invite over to celebrate
- One toy you give to a Christmas gift charity
- One card you mail to a faraway friend
- One tray of cookies you bake for lonely neighbors
- One family you babysit for
- One elderly couple you do some repairs for
- One sick friend you visit

You have a lot of power and resources to lend for "just one." Imagine the impact we could have if we each took care of just one person within our reach.

MARIE ALVERO IS A FORMER MISSIONARY TO AFRICA AND MEXICO. SHE CURRENTLY LIVES A HAPPY, BUSY LIFE WITH HER HUSBAND AND CHILDREN IN CENTRAL TEXAS, USA. ■



# Where Jesus Lives

BY AALIYAH WILLIAMS



“WHO LIVES IN A STABLE?”

“Jesus lives in the stable!”

At first I laughed at that answer my four-year-old sister gave during my impromptu lesson on animals and their habitats. But her answer kept coming back to me. *Jesus lives in the stable.* Was that the *only* place she saw Jesus come alive for me?

I rebelled at the thought. *Surely she’s seen me pray many times. And hadn’t I, just the other day, read from the children’s Bible with her?*

As I sifted through scenes of me hurrying around, juggling my own studies, work, and other activities, I tried to think of times when I’d actually *explained* Jesus to her. Of course I told her about His birth, the miracles He performed, and His life and ministry, but had I told her of the role He played as my best friend?

Did I only bring Him out with the tinsel and the baubles for the

Christmas tree? Did I tuck Him away in the pages of her picture Bible when storytime was done? Or was I daily celebrating His life in such a way that my little sister *knew* Jesus is alive today, not living in a stable but in my heart and hers? Did she see me turning to Him when things got rough and I was nearing the end of my strength? Had I shown her how Jesus could be her best friend too—that if she gave her heart to Him, Jesus would cherish her and love her like no other could?

As another Christmas nears and the festivities begin, one thought is firmly fixed in my mind: This year—and not only at Christmas—I will celebrate the meaning of His life by being aware of His life in my own. I will take Jesus out of the stable and invite Him into my life, in everything I do. Then I can say,

“Jesus was born in a stable, but He lives in my heart and home.”

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You can invite Jesus into your life too:

*Thank You, Jesus, for coming to our world and living like one of us, for suffering all the things that we go through so I could know my heavenly Father’s love. Thank You for dying for me, so I can be reconciled with God and have eternal life in heaven. Please forgive me for all the wrongs I’ve committed. Help me to get to know and love You in a deep and personal way. Amen.*



FROM JESUS WITH LOVE

# THE GIFT OF YOUR TIME

Christmas is always such a busy time. You have more to do than usual. Your to-do list seems never-ending, the hours in the day seem shorter than normal, and the tendency to push yourself is compounded.

Through taking time to rest in Me, to commune with Me in prayer each day, you will be strengthened and refreshed. As you take a break from your work and the mental stress of your day to quietly connect with Me, you will find renewed strength. Whether you can take an extended time or just pause various times throughout the day, by putting aside your hurried thoughts to reflect on Me, you will be giving Me a valuable gift.

This Christmas, I would ask for the gift of your time and sweet communion with Me.